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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the results of two panel surveys conducted in 1992 and 1995 with representative samples of 16- to 65-year old women in Germany. Participants were interviewed individually in their homes. The interviews lasted about two hours and consisted mainly of standardized scales which had to be filled by the participants. The results were divided into subscales for masculinity and femininity characteristics, with a classification for androgynous and indifferent. Gender identity type was then assessed as a function of age and culture in the samples of East and West German women. Attitudes toward work and family were also assessed as were attitudes toward educational objectives. The hypothesis was that androgynous women should make fewer differences between boys and girls in the importance of educational objectives and that they should emphasize feminine as well as masculine objectives similarly. East German women were also expected to emphasize discipline/order more and tolerance less than West German women due to their socialization in a closed-minded political system. Findings show that East German women place more emphasis than West German women on discipline, on male skills for boys, on masculine traits, and less emphasis on tolerance and open-mindedness. In addition, East German women put greater emphasis on the differences between boys and girls than West German women. Overall there are no differences between East and West in sex role attitudes, but an increase is noted in egalitarian attitudes is noted between 1992 and 1995. West German women place slightly but significantly more emphasis on leisure time than women from East Germany, while East German women still put much more emphasis on having children and on being in the labor force than their West German counterparts. (EH)

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Women from Two Cultures: Social Attitudes of East and West German Women after Reunification

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Abstract

In the year of 1990, the German reunification took place, 45 years after World War II. At that time the social situation of women in both parts of Germany was quite different. East Germany had a higher birth rate and at the same time a quite higher female employment rate than West Germany. Women's role expectations were different between both countries. To test the hypothesis of differences between East and West German women with regard to gender identity and sex role behavior und the hypothesis of a narrowing of the gap over time a panel survey with representative samples of German Women was conducted in 1992 (N = 3001) and in 1995 (N = 2022). Participants were asked about several aspects of self-concept including gender identity, about their psychological well-being and sex role attitudes and behavior. As expected the results show that East German women lay more emphasis on having children and on working in the labor force than West German women. The relationships between gender identity and social attitudes and values, as expected from androgyny concept, can partly be confirmed. Differences between the results of 1992 and 1995 are only small.

Women from Two Cultures: Social Attitudes of East and West German Women after Reunification

In the year 1990, the German reunification took place, 45 years after World War II. At that time the social situation of women in both parts of Germany was quite different. East Germany had a higher birth rate and at the same time a quite higher female employment rate than West Germany. The average East German woman had two children, and she had a full-time job thus earning her living on her own. According to the socialist ideology this should result in egalitarian role relationships between men and women. The average West German woman had one child (or two), took a maternity leave for some years, was a housewife or part-time employee, and her husband was regarded as the breadwinner of the family. According to the political ideology of post war West Germany sexes were equal but each couple could choose how to distribute their duties within their family. In essence sex-role expectations for women were quite different between both countries.

We therefore expected that even years after reunification gender identity, sex role attitudes and behaviors would be different between women of both parts of Germany, but that the differences might decrease over time due to the transformation

process. In our panel survey representative samples of German Women between 16 and 60 were asked in 1992 and in 1995 about several aspects of self-concept including gender identity, about their psychological well-being and about sex-role attitudes and behaviors.

Apart from the analysis of intracultural differences in our samples we also tested the relationships between gender identity and social attitudes and values as expected from androgyny concept (cf. Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Bem, 1985; Cook, 1985). Though this concept was investigated quite extensively, social psychological variables, like social attitudes, social relationships, and social behaviors, have been investigated rarely. Due to their aschematic cognitive processing, their flexibility and openness to incoming information, and their atypical gender identity it is assumed that androgynous people are more flexible and more open in their attitudes and behaviors. We therefore wanted to look for relationships between gender identity, especially androgyny, and sex role attitudes and sex role behaviors. We assumed that androgynous women would show a more egalitarian division of labor at home, and less traditional sex role attitudes, as expressed by their

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educational objectives, their attitudes toward work and their role behaviors.

Method

Participants

In the years 1992 and 1995 two panel surveys were conducted with representative samples of 16 to 60 year old women in Germany. Participants were interviewed individually in their homes. The interviews lasted about two hours and consisted mainly of standardized scales which had to be filled in by the participants. Their age ranged from 16 to 65 years. The number of interviewees can be found in Table 1. Depending on the scores on two subscales of the GEPAQ (see below), namely positive masculinity (M+) and positive femininity (F+), participants were divided into four gender identity groups via median split, as recommended by Spence and Helmreich (1978). Those with high masculinity but low femininity scores are classified as masculine. Conversely those with high femininity but low masculinity scores are classified as feminine. Those who score high on both dimensions are androgynous, and those with low scores are classified as indifferent (Table 1).

Table 1.

Number of Interviewees in 1992/1995 and their Gender Identity (Representative Samples of German Women of Ages 16 to 60)

	Androgynous	Masculine	Feminine	Indifferent	All
1992					
n	972	549	586	894	3001
in %	32.4	18.3	19.5	29.8	100.0
1995					
n	640	404	387	591	2022
in %	31.6	20.0	19.2	29.2	100.0

Apart from the youngest and the oldest age groups (Figure 1) there are only small differences in the relative number of androgynous and indifferent women between the East and the West German sample. But relatively more East German women can be classified as feminine (22.7% vs. 17.7%) and less as masculine (17.1 vs. 19.5%). In addition there is a clear age trend: More younger women reach high scores on the masculinity dimension than the elderly (Figure 1, Table 2). And this is more extreme in the West German sample (Table 2). In addition data point to

an increase in the number of masculine women between the years of 1992 and 1995 (18.4% vs. 19.9%).

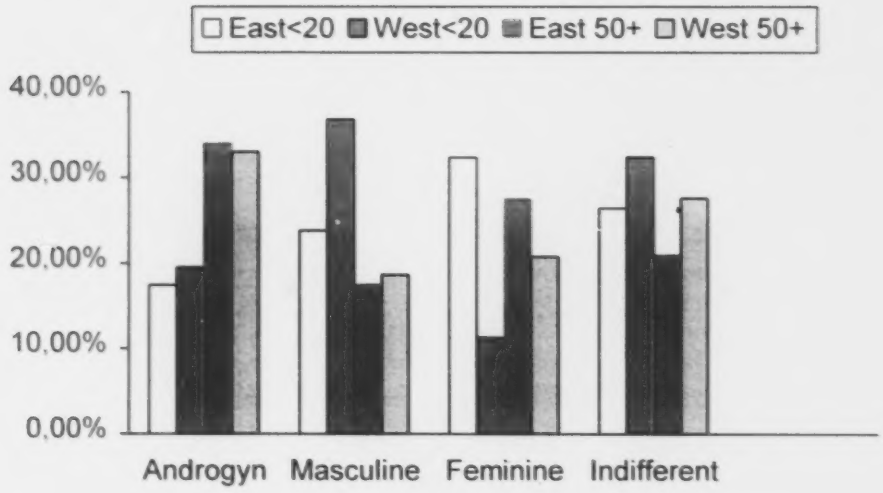

Figure 1.

Gender identity types in the youngest and oldest age groups (both waves combined) in percent of the sample.

Table 2.

Gender Identity Types as a Function of Age and Culture (in Percent of the East and the West German Sample Respectively)

	Androgynous		Masculine		Feminine		Indifferent	
	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	West
Age								
16 to 19 yrs	17.4	19.5	23.8	36.8	32.3	11.3	26.4	32.4
20 to 29 yrs	31.7	32.0	14.9	20.3	19.1	18.1	34.3	29.6
30 to 39 yrs	34.8	35.9	18.5	19.9	15.0	17.9	31.8	26.2
40 to 49 yrs	34.9	36.1	18.8	18.8	17.4	16.0	28.9	29.1
50+ yrs	34.0	33.0	17.5	18.6	27.5	20.8	21.0	27.6

Materials

Gender identity was assessed by a slightly modified version of three subscales of the German version of the Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire (GEPAQ) (Runge, Frey, Gollwitzer, Helmreich, & Spence, 1981), namely Positive Femininity (F+), Negative Femininity (F-) and Positive Masculinity (M+). Participants were then categorized into one of four gender identity types via median-split on the F+ and M+-

scales as indicated above. To keep results comparable the median split was based on the median of 1992 for both waves.

Sex role attitudes were assessed by an 11-item scale, similar to other well-known scales, like the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) by Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1973). Each item had to be rated on a four-point scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 4 (fully agree). Sum scores may range from 11 to 44 with higher scores indicating more egalitarian attitudes.

In addition, participants got a list of 22 educational objectives, which had to be rated in importance for a boy and for a girl on four-point scales from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important). The list was administered in varying order twice, first for a boy and then for a girl or vice versa. A factor analysis of the 22 objectives revealed a six-factor solution: Tolerance and Open-mindedness (e.g. accept pluralism), (Self-)Discipline (e.g. self-control), typically Male Skills (e.g. technical skills), typically Female Skills (e.g. household duties), Masculine Traits (like assertiveness), Feminine Traits (like helpfulness).

Attitudes toward work and family were assessed by several scales. First the interviewees got a 28-items scale measuring the importance of various aspects of work. Participants had to

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answer each item on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important). A factor analysis of the 28 items revealed five factors two of which reflect more feminine aspects of work, Social Relationships and Altruism („to have a good social climate", „to help other people"), and Comfortableness („an occupation with much leisure time", „an occupation which suits the demands of my family"). The other three factors reflect more masculine aspects of work, Autonomy („to work on my own"), Finances („high income"), and Typically Male Activities („an occupation requiring technical skills", „an occupation requiring high mobility").

In addition the interviewees were asked to rate the importance of children, of leisure and of work on four-point scales each (from not at all important to very important).

Results

Attitudes Toward Family and Family Roles

Educational objectives. Our hypothesis was that androgynous women should make less differences between boys and girls in the importance of educational objectives and that they should emphasize feminine as well as masculine objectives similarly. We also expected East-West differences as had been corrobarated by other surveys: East German women should emphasize

discipline/order more and tolerance less than West German women due to their socialization in a closed-minded political system.

On the whole changes in importance of educational objectives between the two waves can only be found for the East German samples. In 1995 East German women emphasize even more the importance of discipline and order (Figure 2), and of typically male skills (Figure 3), especially computer skills than three years earlier.

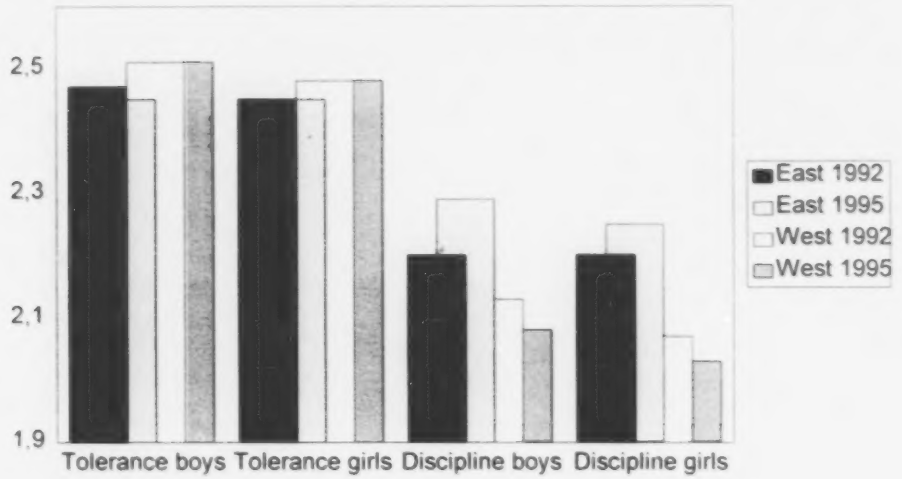

Figure 2.

Tolerance and discipline as educational objectives for boys and girls in 1992 and 1995. Figures represent mean scale values from 1 to 4. The higher the score the more important the objective.

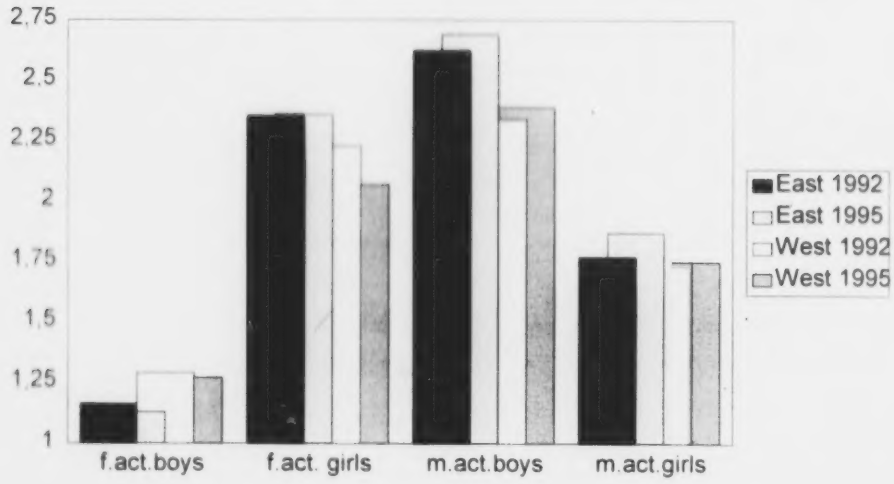

Figure 3.

Typically female (f. act.) and typically male skills (m. act.) as educational objectives for boys and girls in 1992 and 1995. Figures represent mean scale values from 1 to 4. The higher the score the more important the objective.

There are also significant differences between East and West German women. East German women lay more emphasis than West German women on discipline (Figure 2), on male skills for boys (Figure 3), on masculine traits and (Figure 4) and less emphasis on tolerance and open-mindedness (Figure 2). In addition they make more differences between boys and girls than the West German women: Feminine traits and female skills are significantly more highly emphasized for girls than for boys, and masculine traits and male skills for boys respectively (Figures 3 and 4).

The results for educational objectives as a function of gender type clearly support the assumption that androgynous women make less differences in educational obejectives for boys and girls than feminine and masculine women. But the indifferent women also make less gender differences and support an egalitarian view of education. This seems to support the idea of Bem (1985) that androgynous and indifferent persons both think in an aschematic way. On the other hand the indifferent women in our samples support all objectives less than the androgynous women.

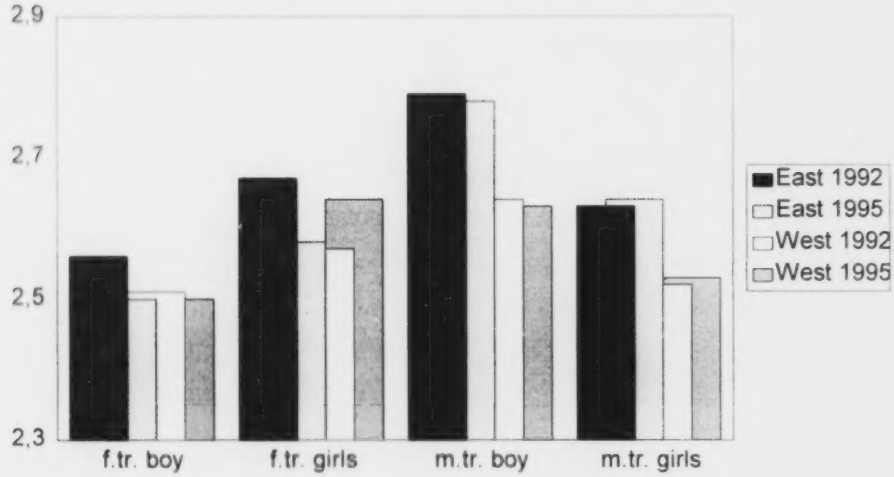

Figure 4.

Feminine (f. tr.) and masculine traits (m. tr.) as educational objectives for boys and girls in 1992 and 1995. Figures represent mean scale values from 1 to 4. The higher the score the more important the objective.

Sex role attitudes. As expected androgynous and masculine women have less traditional and more egalitarian attitudes than feminine and indifferent women (Figure 5). Overall there are no differences between East and West in sex role attitudes, but an increase in egalitarian attitudes between both 1992 and 1995.

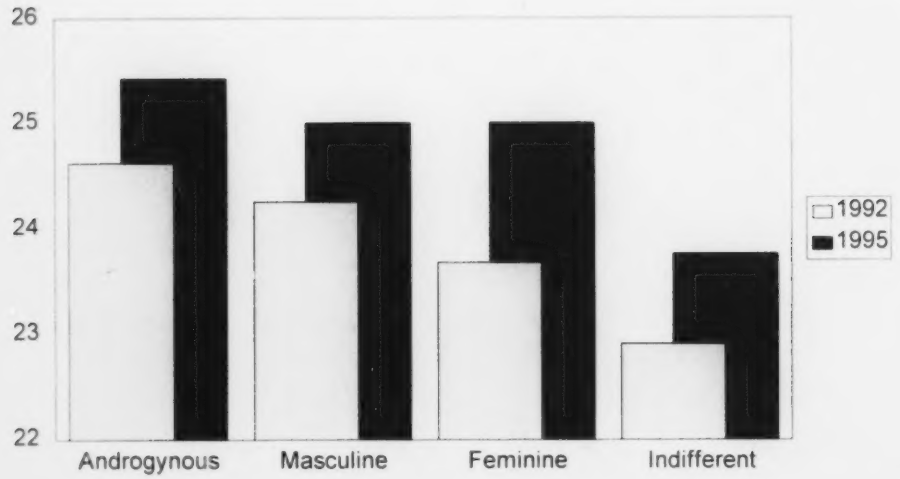

Figure 5.

Sex role attitudes in 1992 and 1995 as a function of gender identity. The higher the score the more egalitarian the attitudes.

Attitudes toward family and family roles. Due to their different socialization experiences we expected East German women to emphasize children and work more and leisure time less than the West German women. And due to the cultural transformation process we expected a decrease of the differences between both panels.

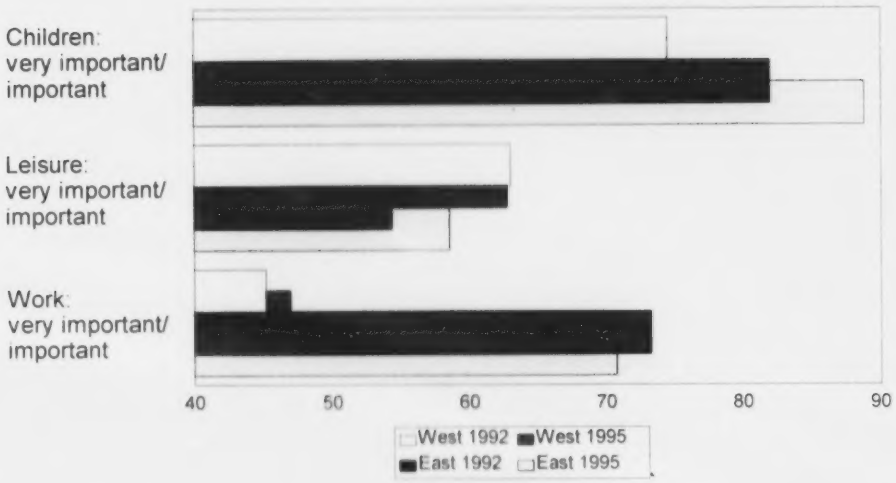

Figure 6.

Importance of children, leisure and work for East and West German women. Figures represent percentages of the two samples respectively.

Despite the tremendous changes in Germany the attitudes of the women of both parts have remained quite constant (Figure 6). This means: West German women lay slightly but significantly more emphasis on leisure time than women from East Germany. East German women still put much more emphasis on having children and on being in the labor force than West German women. The double

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role as mother and worker is still alive. Nevertheless in reality the fertility rate in East Germany has declined dramatically in the past years. This points to a change if not in values but in behavior.

When differentiating between the gender identity types highly masculine women (androgynous and masculine women) emphasize the importance of work significantly more often than low feminine women. On the other hand highly feminine women (i.e. the androgynous and the feminine) rate the importance of children for their lives much higher than low feminine (masculine and indifferent) women. This is in accordance with androgyny concept.

Attitudes Toward Work

We expected androgynous women to emphasize masculine and feminine aspects of work alike. On the other hand masculine women should rate masculine aspects higher and feminine women should rate feminine aspects higher. The results confirm the hypothesis for autonomy and social relationships/altruism. Androgynous women and masculine women emphasize autonomy more than the other two gender identity groups whereas social/altruistic aspects of work are more highly emphasized by androgynous and feminine women (Figure 7).

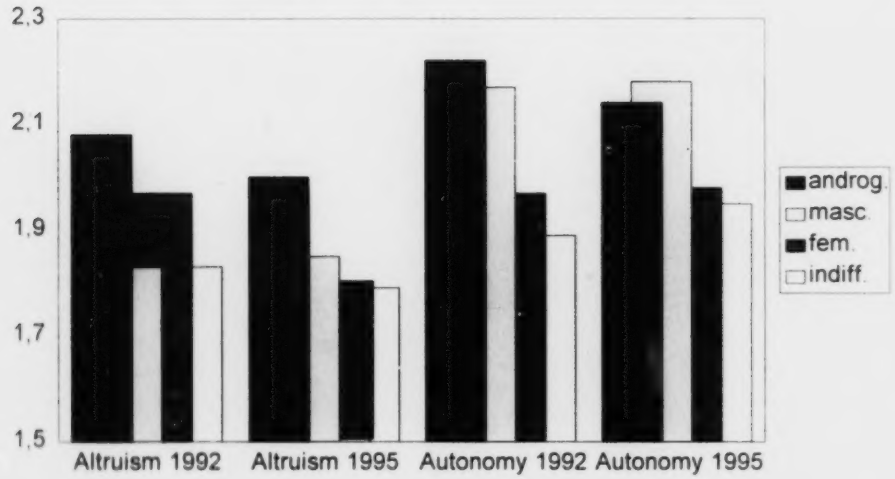

Figure 7.

Importance of the work values altruism and autonomy as a function of gender identity. Figures represent mean scale values from 1 to 4. The higher the score the more important the value.

When looking for differences between East and West German women, we can see a clearly different picture on two of the five dimensions. In both surveys East German women rate altruistic aspects as more important than West German women do. On the other hand comfortableness (like compatibility with the family; easy way of handling the job) is rated as less important. The

latter underlines the result reported earlier that for East German women to have a job is more important for their own identity.

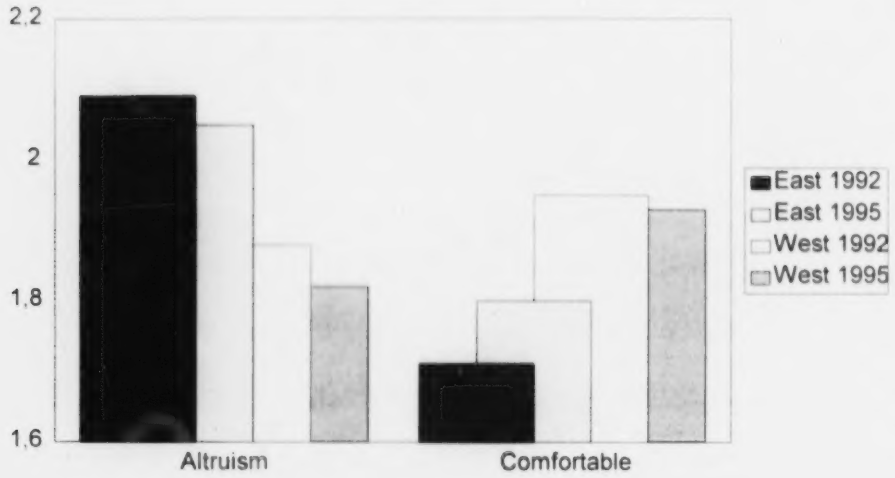

Figure 8.

Importance of the work values of altruism and comfortableness for East and West German women. Figures represent mean scale values from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important).

Conclusions

All in all the results show only rarely significant changes between 1992 and 1995. And though there are big similarities

between East and West German women there are also significant differences. These are mainly due to the different attitudes toward work and family: As compared to West German women East German women still feel it much more important to have a job and to have children. As these values are nowadays put into question from society due to a high unemployment rate and due to the seemingly increasing difficulties in combining work and family this might help to explain why East German women feel less at ease at the moment than some years ago, as can be shown by data on optimism and well-being which were not reported here.

The relationships between gender identity and various social attitudes and behaviors are mostly clear with regard to sex role attitudes, educational objectives, and attitudes toward work and family. These are presented in more detail in Alfermann (1993; 1995) They clearly support the assumptions, derived from androgyny concept, that androgynous women emphasize open-mindedness, tolerance, and autonomy more than the other gender identity types. In addition they support egalitarian attitudes on sex role attitudes scales, in their division of labor at home and in educational objectives more than the other gender identity types.

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Parts of the data were presented at the XIVth Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD) 1996 in Québec City, Québec, Canada. Parts of the results from 1992 can be found in:

Alfermann, D. (1993). Androgynie [Androgyny]. In D. Reigber (Ed.), Frauen-Welten (pp. 147-200). Düsseldorf: Econ.

Alfermann, D. (1995). Women and androgyny: Are androgynous women better prepared for a professional career? In L. Amançio & C. Nogueira (Eds.), Gender, management, and science (pp. 177-194). Braga, Portugal: Universidade do Minho.

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